

The Secret of Sin and Suffering



CLARA M. CODD

COPYRIGHT

1931

The Secret of Sin and Suffering

by

CLARA M. CODD

Senior National Lecturer
to the Theosophical Society
in England.

THE THEOSOPHICAL PRESS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS
1931

THE SECRET OF SIN AND SUFFERING

*"Who toiled a slave may come anew a prince
For gentle worthiness and merit won;
Who ruled a king may wander earth in rags
For deeds done and undone."*

The problems of life, to be even faintly understood, must be viewed from a great standpoint. In the night of time they are rooted and cannot be judged from the present hour alone. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His Way, before the works of old." Man is not a newly created, arbitrarily dowered, being. He is a creature in process of evolution, an ever-progressing, ever-unfolding unit of consciousness. Faint are the adumbrations of the glory from which he came, and it doth not yet appear what he shall be. But that will surely be made manifest, even here, as the ages roll by, for not one life but many lives are his; this present span is but one day of a long series through which God's increasing purpose is made known and achieved in him.

EVIL PART OF THE DIVINE ORDER

Man is not separate from the surrounding universe. The two are intimately related. The problem of the individual is the problem of the world, and in solving his own mystery man solves the mystery of the universe, which is the field of his growth and evolution.

Sometimes we think that if we were the Creative Power we would mould the world nearer to our heart's desire, and leave out evil and pain. Then we should have a very insipid universe, and men, instead of being self-determining, self-directive intelligences, would be mere automata. For evil is part of the Divine Order, of the Divine Life. Does that seem a startling thought? We have it voiced in our own scriptures. "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." (Isaiah 45). The same

truth is found in that immortal scripture of the East, the Bhagavad Gita. "I am the gambling of the cheat, and the splendour of splendid things I."

THE "FALL" OF MAN

From the bosom of the Father, Eternal Life, we, the Divine possibilities, came forth long ages ago, and "fell" into these lower planes of experience, in order that through slow unfoldment and growth we might realize our potentialities, and learn to express ourselves fully in them. Thus we left the "Garden of Eden" to eat the bitter bread of life's experience here.

We all have Adam and Eve within us. Adam, "earth," is the visible bodily self; Eve, the more intuitive soul. The Creative Hierarchies, symbolized by the serpent, attracted the Divine units of consciousness out into the "cycle of necessity," to begin their tremendous evolution. They were to achieve self-consciousness, and for this they had to come under the play of what in the East is called "the pairs of opposites." Everything has its opposite. Black and white, day and night, joy and sorrow, activity and rest, man and woman; and finally good and evil. These are a necessary condition for the evolution of self-consciousness. For unless we had had experience of the night we should not know that it was the day, unless we had been unhappy we should not know we were happy, unless we had experienced evil we should not know wherein good truly lay.

The ancient Hindu scriptures, more metaphysical than ours, symbolized this truth in the story of the churning of the waters of space by the Devas, the forces of Light, and the Asuras, the powers of Darkness. They push in opposite directions, yet as the wheel of time and space revolves, it is the same direction.

But all the pairs of opposites can be placed on two sides, one of the pair being eternal, the other temporary. All good is in its essential nature eternal, all evil temporary. Yet while it exists it has its temporary function, and we are brought into touch with it to evolve the

discriminating, self-determining faculty, that we may know how to choose the good and how to reject the evil.

Life is a continual round of choices. Often we choose unwisely, but that is because we have not yet had sufficient experience. Like a child we choose ignorantly, so the East says that the "original sin" which taints us all is the vice of *avidya*, being without the true knowledge. And if some should ask why Life created us ignorant, to learn by bitter experience, we can but reply that it is the universal law. Is a child born full grown? Does a tree spring at once into being? Souls grow like flowers, "every seed after its own kind." That is again a wonderful truth taught us by evolution. All life begins in a tiny seed. And the miracle of nature is that all the beauty and power which afterwards unfolds is already contained within that tiny beginning. It can only become itself. And a man can only unfold what he essentially is. In the words of Saint Ambrose, Christian bishop and saint, "Become that which you are."

*"Truth is within ourselves. It takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in ourselves
Where truth abides in fulness; and to know
Rather consists in finding out a way
Whence the imprisoned glory may escape
Than by effecting entrance for a light
Supposed to be without!"*

How does that original ignorance slowly but surely become removed? Here we come to a very wonderful and mysterious thing, the real origin of sorrow and sin.

WHAT SIN REALLY IS

What is sin? Dr. Hastings, in his Dictionary of the Bible, writes: "Three cognate forms in Hebrew with no distinction of meaning express sin as *missing one's aim*, and correspond to the Greek and its cognates in the New Testament. The etymology does not suggest a person against whom the sin is committed, and

does not necessarily imply intentional wrong-doing. The form translated "iniquity" literally means perversion or distortion and indicates a quality of actions rather than an act itself. Again in the New Testament the two Greek words translated as sin presuppose the existence of a law." Hence it is clear that sin is a violation of natural law, a transgression, a movement across the flow of the evolutionary tide, instead of progression, a movement forward with it. To sin is to miss the true aim of life, the furthering of the increasing purpose by the co-operative movement of the whole towards truth and beauty. Yet it must needs be that offenses come, for offenses are the mark of the evolution of the will. Only by repeated choosings can the true power of choice emerge, under the operation of a law which says that what a man sows that shall he surely reap, that the measure he metes out to other men shall be measured to him again.

THE REIGN OF LAW

Life evolves under the reign of majestic, immutable law, the "impress of the Divine Mind upon matter." If we set in operation a sequence of Nature's laws that bring us personal pain we must not blame Nature. Her laws act according to their nature with a magnificent disregard of our personal likes and dislikes, perhaps because their aims are directed towards impersonal, cosmic ends, even for ourselves.

Thus, our thoughts, great and lovely, or ignoble and petty, are not only affecting the minds of others within our neighborhood, but are fashioning or deforming the inner self, creating character and capacity for future lives. And our longings and intentions are exerting magnetic pressure on the surrounding universe, finally bringing to our hands the things we long for, or aspire after.

And our actions are creating our environment. These results are more easily seen, for we know that every word and deed makes a difference to the rest of the world. Rarely do we stop to ask ourselves what kind of difference.

It must be one of two. Either each word and act is adding to the sum of the world's happiness and progress, or it is detracting from it. Which-ever it is the like will one day return to ourselves, creating the help or injury, the friends and foes, of every-day life.

THE GREAT LAW

This fundamental law is described many times in the Christian Bible.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Gal. 6).

"They that sow iniquity and sow wickedness reap the same." (Job).

"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself but shall not be heard." (Proverbs).

It is the well-known Golden Rule. Thus the Buddha taught that hatred ceased never by hatred, only by love. And the Christ taught:—"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law."

We learn to obey that law by the re-actions of life we call sorrow and pain, for the Great Law is the Divine Life in action. Hence it is the law which cannot err, being Justice itself; it is the law which cannot hurt, being Love itself. "Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work." The word mercy comes from the Latin *merces*, pay, recompense; from the stem of *mereor*, I deserve.

THE RE-ACTION TO RIGHT DOING

So when a man chooses that which helps the evolutionary will, joy comes with enlightened choosing; and this response is described in the Christian scriptures by the words peace, joy, blessing, favour.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace." (Psalm 37).

"Well done, good and faithful servant, . . . enter thou into the joy (Latin, "shining") of thy Lord." (Matt. 25).

"For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous: with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield." (Psalm 5).

The result is a strengthening of the bond between God and man. Every right step upon the Great Road leading from darkness to Light is such, so that the last stages are lost in a transcendent and glowing glory.

THE RE-ACTION TO WRONG DOING

But when a man chooses that which is for himself alone, without consideration for the progress and the good of all, misery and darkness follow close upon his heels, for as surely as peace follows upon well-doing, so surely does pain follow in the footsteps of sin. They are not separate, the cause and its inevitable result. They are like the two sides of one coin, the two ends of one stick. The Hebrew teachers and prophets understood this so well that in the original of our Old Testament the same word is used for sin as for the consequences of sin. Professor Schultze says:—"In the consciousness of the pious Israelite, sin, guilt, and punishment are ideas so directly connected that the words for them are interchangeable."

The result of the mistakes called sin is temporary limitation, described in the Christian scriptures as darkness, death, being cut off, cast into prison. The word "hell" does not mean a place of torture, but simply in prison, out of contact. There are no soul prisons except those which men weave round themselves by selfish thought and desire.

When we began the great path of evolution, we committed, through ignorance, many an anti-social deed, placed many a stumbling block in our brother's way. Every hurt done through hate or carelessness in the past now comes back as limitation and pain, since all are one, and not one of us can think, desire, or act, without

affecting the rest of the world. That is Nature's re-action to sin.

THE MEANING OF PAIN

But the great truth to grasp is that it is the cure of the original blindness. Pain and discomfort are always evidence of Nature's curative forces at work, physically or psychically.

"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." (Jer.)

Too often we look on our sorrows and frustrations only as retribution. They are not so much retribution as education. The process entails pain, but it is the pain of birth, not dissolution. The tragedy of humanity is not the sinking of a ship, but the bursting of a bud. We question sorrow because we somehow feel it alien to ourselves. We never question joy. That is because happiness is more akin to our deepest nature, and when a man is true to himself, peace is in his possession. For God Who is Love is also Bliss, and as water seeks ever its own level, so the divinity in man seeks ever the Love and Joy which are himself.

So do not let us say: "Because of this in the past, so is it now with me in the present." That is the wrong way of looking at it. "Because of what I shall be in the future, so is it now with me in this present." For if we look backwards, down the stream of time, we shall read fate as retribution; but if we look forwards, up that ever widening tide, we shall see it as opportunity, unfoldment. And that is the true way for everyone of us who are going forward all the time.

This was evidently the view point of the Christ, for when his disciples asked Him concerning the man who was born blind whether the man or his parents had sinned in the past to bring about that result, He replied that it was not retribution but "that the works of God should be made manifest in him," that is, for the gradual release of the imprisoned divinity.

THE GROWING PAINS OF LIFE

We must view pain aright that we may lose our fear of it. If we could do that wholly, even welcome and open our arms to it, we should grow very fast. That is why the higher indifference, called in the East *vairagya*, is eagerly sought after by the man who is trying to reach the goal of life, called in the East, liberation, and in the West, salvation. But from what are we saved or liberated save the ignorance of our smaller selves with its attendant sorrow? "When all the bonds of the heart are broken, then this mortal puts on immortality."

The soul of man has often been compared to a flowing river, flowing to the great sea, the Divine Life, which is at once the source and the goal of his being. Was there ever a river which did not one day reach the sea? And it never goes straight to the sea. It takes its own path, peculiar to itself, and its windings and its wanderings make the infinite variety of life and experience. But though it does not go straight, it always goes on. Sometimes it flows through a cool, green wood. It does not desire to remain there as we too often desire who hug our joys and will not let them pass. And when it reaches a sandy waste it does not refuse to go through. With the goal ever calling, it passes on. So the Christ in everyone of us, the hope of our future glory, calls to us to let the past be past, and to follow Him, the ideal, into the ever widening future.

Like a seed planted in the ground, the divinity in each one of us lives and grows upwards. In some it is only germinating. In others the green shoot has appeared above the ground. In a few, the flower of our race, the men made perfect, and called Divine by lesser men, it has fully flowered, blessing with its fragrance for evermore the souls of men. But that which is seed and bud as yet in us will flower too, one day, as it has already done in Them. Day after day, in our greater life, whereof each day is called a life, it is shone upon by the sunshine of human joy, and nourished by the rain of human tears. They have different functions in Nature's

economy. Happiness is the expanding force. When we are happy we feel "more." Sometimes a very happy person will put it in these terms. "I feel so happy I could take the whole world into my arms!"

Sorrow is the purifying power, or to use a modern term, the "sublimating" force. When we do not let ourselves grow bitter, sorrow will make us more sensitive, more refined. The ancient Celts said of a man who suffered much; "That man is making his soul." Joys are our wings, sorrows our spurs.

THE REGULATION OF THE RETURNS

Sometimes as we view life it seems as if the kind and good had more than their share of sorrow, whilst the selfish and careless flourish as the green bay tree! This is because Life will not ask a man to learn a lesson too hard for him. "God doth not suffer a man to be tempted (i.e. tested) beyond what he is able." In the past we have all of us dealt injuries to others. If the resulting re-action came back at once, we might be crushed. So, often it comes long afterwards, when the man has grown, and like gold tried in the furnace, he is refined, not destroyed. This is specially noticeable in a man nearing the path to Adeptship, for on that last path he must pay every out-standing debt incurred in the past, in order to be freed for greater service.

"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," that is purifieth, for the Latin word, *castus*, means pure.

"If ye endure pain, God dealeth with you as sons; but if ye be without pain, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons, Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." (Heb. 12: 5-11).

Pain is Nature's spur turning us from the blind ways which lead nowhere to the one way which leads home. This is the real "forgiveness of sins." Not that we escape the results

of our deeds. That we can never do. By those very results are we purified and set free, the Christ in us, the Immortal One within, thus making atonement for the sins of his personalities life by life. But when a man ceases his evil ways and steps in the other direction, he puts himself once more in line with the progressive forces of the universe which all conspire to aid him.

"The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God."

And let us never mind whether the reward of our kindness in the shape of gratitude comes or not. Gratitude is a virtue belonging to growth. A baby is not grateful to its mother, for it is not yet old enough to understand. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." Sometimes after many days which are lives.

It is said that one day a Maharani came to see the Buddha to ask Him how in a future life she could be surrounded by loving and generous friends. "In this life, O Queen," replied the Lord, "you must learn to give away with both hands." Is this not paralleled by the words of the Christ:—"Give and it shall be given unto you, pressed down, shaken together and running over shall men give into your bosom."

THE FINAL GOAL OF BLISS

One day all will come to final beatitude and bliss. That peace, that bliss, belong to the freed, illuminated man, the one in whom the spiritual nature, the Christ within, is born and attained to its stature and fulness. By virtue of his complete identification with the spiritual, impersonal life within, he has ceased to generate personal karma. "The law of the spirit of life . . . hath made me free of the law of sin and death." (Romans). Action done with a personal motive produces a personal result. It takes and gives an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Saint Paul's "law of sin and death." But the spiritual nature pours

itself out without thought of return, radiating like the sun on all alike, bringing no personal reaction beyond ever greater power to bless and aid.

In those days, seeing with clear eyes, we shall understand, and put an end to pain, Immortal Life being all in all. Then, if we judge our judgment will be just, because uncoloured by personal desire.

Thus, in the long ways of heaven the pilgrim soul turns the atonement into the At-onement. Having learnt every lesson life can teach, purified and conquered every plane of matter in himself, he can now express his true self in divine perfection, and can approach and eat of that other tree, the tree of conscious eternal life. The great cycle of life is complete, the Prodigal Son has returned. In each one of us, yes, in the veriest outcast, a future Adept, a Christ, is growing up, and like our Elder Brother of the Ages, we too must learn obedience by the things which we suffer, that being made perfect we in our turn may become the author of eternal salvation to others on the Great Road behind us.

LEARNING THE LESSONS OF PAIN

Understanding better, let us try to learn the lessons of sorrow and trouble. Have we a weakly body, frail health? If this still persists when we have done all we know to ensure good health, let us take it as an opportunity to realize ourselves as souls. Once a man told the Buddha that he feared he could not live a spiritual life because he was sick. "But your soul is not sick," the Lord replied. A woman became crippled for life by a hunting accident. It took long hours on a couch to make her realize that she had intelligence and a soul. She had only been a healthy animal before.

Our best plans go awry. Perhaps another steps in and injures them. He could not have done that except we had generated the cause in the past. He is but the unconscious agent of the Law. Let us never seek revenge. Vengeance is mine, saith the Great Law, whose

utter impartiality makes the return just and educative. It could never be that with us, who should not judge if we would not be judged in our turn.

And the pain of love scorned is our own denial of love come back to us. The torn heart makes clear to us, by way of personal experience, the sorrow that once we planted in another's soul, that never again shall a brother man suffer that pain at our hands.

The hypocrisy that self-love prompted to clothe itself in deeds and words untrue comes back, sometimes long afterwards, as the pain of unmerited reproach, of life-long misunderstanding by others. So is man taught God's Truth that may not be broken. And when blind rage or selfish cruelty defaces the body of a brother man, to the doer thereof comes back, in the future, deformity or terrible disease. By the unfolding of the inner nature he may now have long transcended the old blindness of heart, yet does his ancient sin now find him out, telling the tremendous truth that all life is divine, God-given, and the body of a man the sacred temple of the highest Spirit. Most terrible of all is the reaction caused by cruelty of the more refined kind, the deliberate torture of another's mind and heart. This shall come back to the perpetrator as a broken mind, an isolated heart. He shall himself be kept captive in all the generous, life-giving forces of his own nature, but that terrible prison will be of his own making. Verily, for the God's sake within him, he shall by no means come therefrom until he has paid, to the uttermost farthing, the debt of injury caused to others.

Again, the opportunities that are denied, what are they but the other side of opportunities let slip at other times? So shall frustration teach us, in the end, how to turn sloth to power of effort and of will.

Is Nature a hard task-master? Does it seem as if her justice out-weighed her mercy? Justice and mercy are two sides of one indivisible whole. The real man can never be hurt or destroyed. He learns by every succeeding experi-

ence. Holding the scales of justice, blindfolded that at first we may not see the smile, the beauty of her eyes, stands Mercy, The Mother of God Himself. For it is her gift of pain which alone can clear the soul's true vision, healing whilst yet it wounds. Look back over life, and see if this be not true. Have we not learnt such wonder by our sorrow? Are not the best, the bravest, wisest, so often those who most have suffered?

For what does the One Lover of all men mean by pain, but to draw us thuswise ever nearer to His Heart? Our loved ones are seemingly drawn from us, only that we may discover who it was who smiled at us through the beloved's eyes. For all men seek, they needs must, and keep on finding, losing. Yet all losings are one step nearer to the last great finding, when Lover and beloved, God and the soul, are one. He cuts short our ambitions, frustrates our plans, that we may find that there is only One Doer, and only One Work, the service of His worlds. And sometimes He overwhelms the mind with doubt and questioning. The old forms, the old beliefs, are shattered, that man, the immortal one, may seek Truth again, and find again, in fairer, nobler guise.

And then Life speaks to us by the wonderful ways of failure and of shame, so that we may find that strength is not ours but His, to be used for His world and for His people's sake, and never for ourselves, our personal desires and aims. So does the man who begins to understand realize that failure and success are nothing, for behind them both the One Actor is ever winning, and even our unwisdom is turned to account by Him. What is the true success but the unconquerable spirit, serene through all eventualities, because born of Himself? Do greatly, He says to us, and when seeming failure comes, learn to act more wisely still.

But it is when the dark cloak of uttermost shame covers a man that Eternal Life becomes most wonderful, most wholly tender. For then He teaches us how beauty and righteous-

ness are not for ourselves alone, are not even ours that we may have the happiness of being pure and sweet and true, but are His shining through us to illuminate the dark places of the earth. Thus is pride slain that we may learn the purity of heart which never shrinks from any thing of shame, the tenderness of mind which sees the sinner and the saint as one.

THE LARGER HOPE

Be comforted: all things shall come one day in the long future; the ideals we long after, the reparations we would make. So shall God the Beautiful give us always the power to rise again, on stepping-stones of long-dead selves to higher and lovelier things. So, too, shall He give us once again those other selves that we have treated coldly, blindly, that we may make up to them the meed of love and service which was theirs.

One day all pain, all evil will have vanished. Its function will have ceased for us for ever. Evil is but the absence of the good as yet latent, pain but the way whereby that glory is born. All men belong to bliss, to wonder, to uttermost loveliness. The flower which is each man's soul grows in God's garden, and the darkest sorrow, the most hideous pain and evil, cannot, in the long run, hinder the final flowering. Let us be glad to suffer, for the guerdon of wisdom and compassion that crowns pain bravely borne. For if we would know the true inwardness of life, it is just that: strength to bear another's burden, understanding to compassionate and sustain.

Out of the desolation of broken dreams men cry to the Eternal. Critics scoff because men call most upon God when trouble overtakes them, but what is more splendid and more true than the eternal springing upwards of the soul whenever the sword of sorrow sets free the heart? Around a man then seems to lie the vast loneliness of unlit lands, before his vision stretches the slow march of uncounted years. And the spirit shrinks down within him, stretching imploring hands out into the Invisi-

ble that alone may answer and comprehend. Like the beat of sobs the age-long cry of question tears itself from heart and mind.

That is when Life the Beautiful has not yet taught him that pain is Love's Ambassador, His most perfect Messenger. Pain, say the school-men, who do not know, is the punishment for sin, the unerring avenger following upon the heels of mistaken doing. But when did the school-men ever know anything truly? The artist knows more than the philosopher. But the one who knows most of all is the lover, and in the humblest heart wherein love dwells, lies also the seed of the most perfect wisdom.

So, if love in pain be guarded, after a time will be born true vision. He will know, he who suffers and yet loves, how pain is the great regenerator. Because the eyes of the soul were clouded on the outward plane of things, the footsteps faltered, and so those who can never see the heart of things, see sin, and the darkness following after they call retribution. But he in whose heart is love will see otherwise. The Beautiful will show him how pain clears gloriously the dim eyes, how her hands draw away the veils from before the Son of God. A Touch will reach the hands that erstwhile trembled towards Infinity; White Wings enfold the beloved son as yet standing blinded. Into the wounded heart will come healing and white peace. From the depths of it will arise a Voice, a voice that holds in itself the glory of the morning of Creation, yet has no sound. All men hear it, but not with their ears or their mind. It is the Beautiful when He speaks as the sound of many waters, many worlds removed.

"Son of Mine," says the Voice, "all life is a song, even when most hidden in pain. By sorrow is the way to Union carved."

Then, perchance, it will be that, that the little human heart will surrender the woe that henceforth is his no longer but is become love set free for all men's helping.

Clara M. Codd.

